

JESUS' BOYHOOD.

Attempts have not been wanting to thrust on the world spurious lives of Christ, and especially gospels of his boyhood. These have had about them every mark of human invention, and have been in utter contrast with the true gospels, in dignity, naturalness, unaffected narrative, and many other internal proofs of the authentic books. Neither have there been external proofs of their genuineness.

The glimpses of the earlier years of Christ in the genuine gospels are very few. The narrators were satisfied with telling of his birth, the visit of the shepherds and wise men, the presentation in the temple, the flight into Egypt, the return to Nazareth, and the temple visit at twelve years of age. Each of these incidents, however, was momentous in its character and went far to confirm the claim of his messiahship.

The prophets foretold his advent and in just the manner in which it occurred, a descendant of David, born of a virgin mother, in Bethlehem, adored, scorned, his life sought, coming out of Egypt, and of Nazareth. The seeming contradictions of the prophetic story made the confirmation more complete when all the various requirements were accurately and completely fulfilled.

The successive recognition of his supernatural character and mission, in the marvels that occurred in the shepherds' field, in the star that guided the wise men from the East, in the prophetic utterances and rejoicing of Simeon and Anna in the temple, and even in Herod's cruel quest and brutal murders, were only added proof that he was the Hope of Israel, long looked for and needed.

From his early years, perhaps from some time in the second year of his life, to his twelfth, there is a blank. Then comes the one glimpse into his boyhood, the occasion of his visit to the Passover. The story is too familiar to need recounting. He was evidently trusted by his parents, else they would have concerned themselves sooner about him when he was not seen. He was also evidently well acquainted with the temple precincts and the opportunities there. He was a good listener and knew the next best thing for a child, how to ask questions wisely. He evidently also realized already his mission. His reply to Joseph and Mary, when they told him how anxiously they had sought him, was "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" These are his first recorded words, and they bear a striking likeness to those of the night in which he was betrayed, when in praying to the Father, he said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

The lesson is very clear that it is possible to have in very early years a proper conception of our duty towards God. And may it not be that the conception which Jesus then had was the secret of the next statement concerning him, that he went on down to Nazareth with his parents, "and was subject unto them," and still further that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man?"

This one glimpse of Jesus in his boyhood suggests that there was much else like it, had it been told. Some one has beautifully said that the Saviour's early life

was like an enclosed garden, full of fragrance and beauty, and this one incident was the rambling over the wall of one vine to let us know of the richness that was within.

TEACHING BY PARADOX.

The fondness of the Bible writers for the paradox is noteworthy. "When I am weak then am I strong." "I live, yet not I." "If we suffer, we shall also reign." "Take my yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest." "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister." "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." "Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you." "Come unto me. . . . No man cometh unto me except the Father draw him."

This method of teaching by the frequent use of apparently contradictory words or phrases seems to have been a part of the peculiarity of the oriental literary and didactic style. Its use in the Scriptures is not out of accord with the methods prevailing in the days and lands of the Bible writers. It is not designed to puzzle us, nor yet to startle, but by the sharpness of the contrast of ideas to enforce truth in the most vivid and impressive manner.

At the same time, there underlies most of these Bible paradoxes a profound and far-reaching philosophical fact. Weakness is strength, obedience is mastery, service is greatness, humility is exaltation, suffering is glory, death is life. Self-abnegation stands at the very threshold of all true greatness and finally of all the best success. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The first step in spiritual progress is that a man awake to a consciousness of his own inability. It is only then that he is ready and willing to turn to the source of true strength and to leave all to his Saviour. The first step in mastery over others is in getting self under subjection and learning how to serve faithfully. When one has learned what obedience is by obeying, and when one shows his sense of obligation to the relations of life which bind him, he is fitted to exercise mastery. It is only when one has died to self that it is evident that the new life is kindled in his soul by him who quickeneth whom he will. One grace is born, through God, of another grace, and it is of the lower graces, such as humility, obedience, patience under trial, and the like, that the higher come. God knows the heart of man too well, and loves his people too tenderly, to allow them to be without these "mother graces."

Those who are observant and thoughtful will endorse every word of these sentences from Fairbairn's "The Old Testament in Religion": "Dogmatism is not peculiar to men who believe; it is often more characteristic of men who disbelieve. You may any day find the most arrogant, because the most ignorant, dogmatism disguised as skepticism. Indeed, I will venture to say you will find more in a week's issue of the so-called free-thought press than in all the decrees of the Council of Trent."